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ABSTRACT

This study examines preadolescents' choice of admired individuals and the reasons given in support of that admiration in two different cultures. Students in the fourth and fifth grades of a public school in East Brunswick, New Jersey and in a Jewish parochial school in the same community comprised the American sample of 100 boys and 115 girls. A West African sample consisted of 74 girls and 77 boys enrolled in grades 5-11 in the Carver Mission School in Monrovia, Liberia. Boys ranged in age from 10-24 years; girls from 10-21. Each student in both samples wrote a brief essay describing the person whom the student most admired and the reasons for that admiration. Some East Brunswick students also completed a rating scale. Liberians admired parents, relatives, and teachers because of what they do for the child and because of their personal qualities. While American children admired parents, boys also admired sports figures and girls admired peers. Sex differences were reflected in the criteria for admiration. Boys were more likely than girls to cite achievement. The role of nationality and gender as determinants of admiration is discussed in relation to Bakan's (1966) concept of agency and communion. Parallels to findings of sex differences in moral judgment were noted. (RH)

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Comparison of American and African Students on Who is Admired and Why

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Abstract

Imitation of role models is assumed to play a key developmental role but little is known about how models are selected. An answer to that question was sought through a brief essay about an individual or individuals that are personally admired and the reason for admiration. The essayists were fourth and fifth grade students at a public school and a Jewish parochial school in East Brunswick, N.J. and students at a Christian Mission School in Liberia.

Liberians admire parents, relatives, and teachers because of what they do for the child and because of their personal qualities. While American children also admire parents, boys admire sports figures and girls admire peers. Sex differences are also reflected in the criteria for admiration: boys are more likely to cite acheivement. The role of nationality and gender as determinants of admiration were discussed in relation to D. Bakan's concepts of agency and communion. Parallels to findings of sex differences in moral judgment were also noted.

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Although the values of today's young people is, and probably always has been a popular topic of discussion in the press and at the dinner table, the data base for such discussions is open to question. The Monitoring the Future project at the University of Michigan has examined the values of high school students in America for many years, and recently the Girl Scouts of America have sponsored a study. The results of these surveys do provide some statistical evidence but the data shed little light upon the development of values or the variables that influence the developmental process. It is only within the more restricted realm of moral judgment that developmental issues have been explored, primarily by Kohlberg and his associates (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs & Lieberman, 1983). Those findings have been questioned by Gilligan (1982) who suggests that the Kohlberg procedures get at issues of justice which is not the exclusive criterion for moral judgment. Her work suggests that females are more often concerned with a different criterion, one of social harmony, and that males also apply this criterion under appropriate questioning. The present study examines values as they are reflected in the choice of admired individuals and the reasons given in support of that admiration. It considers differences between boys and girls in two very different cultures: that of middle class America and West Africa, to determine the effect of the variables of gender and culture upon the choice of presumed role models by pre-adolescent youngsters.

Method

Subjects. Students in the fourth and fifth grades of a public school in East Brunswick, N. J. and of a Jewish parochial school in the same community constitute the American sample. There were a total of 100 boys and 115 girls of whom 11 boys and 11 girls were parochial school students. The community from which they were drawn is a large suburban community with a heterogeneous but largely middle class population.

The West African students were enrolled in Grades 5 - 11 of the Carver Mission School in Monrovia, Liberia. The boys ranged in age from 10 - 24 (mean= 15.82, s.d.= 2.72); the girls from 10 - 21 (mean= 15.26, s.d.= 2.27). Part of the reason for the advanced ages is that the school charges tuition ($150, $230, or $340 for elementary, junior, and senior high respectively). Although public schooling is available, and used by about 60% of all school-age children, private schooling is considered to be better and this particular school has a good reputation. There were a total of 74 girls and 77 boys.

Procedure. Each student, during a class session, wrote a brief essay on a provided form describing a person or persons who was most admired and the reasons for that admiration. Most essays were brief but length varied. Some of the East Brunswick students also completed a rating scale.

Results

Coding of the data. In order to provide for computer processing of the essay responses, they were coded by the first author according to a scheme summarized in the appendix. Both object of and reason for admiration are coded in a hierarchical classification scheme with broad categories containing finer breakdowns. For admired individual the finer categories were: parent; other relative or teacher; sibling or peer: these three classes comprise individuals personally known to the respondent while the remaining categories are presumed to be not personally known. They include political figures; humanitarians; intellectual figures (writers, artists, scientists); entertainers; sports figures; wealthy persons; and others not classifiable into these categories. Reasons for admiration were classified as focusing upon contributions (to the well-being of the respondent or a larger group), attributes of the admired individual, or acheivement (because of position, acclaim, or skill).

Admired individuals. Frequency and percent of first-named admired individuals by category are shown in Table 1 according to sex and nationality of the

respondent. Among Africans parents are admired by almost half of all respondents with mentors and peers following in frequency. Other categories are named infrequently. African boys and girls do not differ significantly with respect to the identity of the individual they admire.

Among American students, on the other hand, sex differences are clearly evident: $X^2(3) = 24.37$, $p<.001$. While 25% of both boys and girls list a parent or parents as most admired, girls list a peer more frequently than a parent (41%), while boys admire sports figures almost as much as they do parents. The third most frequently named category is mentors for girls and peers for boys; both list an entertainer as the fourth most frequently named category. As with Africans, political figures, humanitarians, and intellectual figures are infrequently named as most admired. Comparison of African and American students independent of sex yields $X^2(3) = 41.21$, $p<.001$. The difference is primarily attributable to the greater tendency among Africans to admire parents and mentors (respect for their elders?) and to the greater tendency among Americans to admire sports figures and entertainers, an infrequent focus of admiration for Africans. There is also a suggestion that American children are more admiring of peers than are Africans.

Insert Table 1 about here

The identity of the admired individual does not reflect the sex of that individual. That information is presented in Table 2. As might be expected, males tend to admire males and females tend to admire females. The tendency to admire a like-sexed individual is statistically significant in both nationality groups: $X^2(2) = 15.95$, $p<.001$ for Africans and $X^2(2) = 77.80$, $p<.001$ for Americans. In both cases, the effect is somewhat more marked among boys than among girls, especially for American boys, 70% of whom admire a male. This effect is reflected in $X^2(2) = 6.92$, $p<.05$ for comparison of African to American students independent of sex. Ratings of representative individuals

on a rating scale by American children (data for which are not included here) suggest that boys tend to devalue females relative to ratings assigned by girls rather than that boys rate males more highly than girls do.

Insert Table 2 about here

Reasons for admiration. A classification of the reasons for admiration of an individual is given in Table 3. For African students the most frequently given reason has to do with contributions of the individual to the respondent (quite often it is "pays my tuition") with qualities of the individual a close second, especially among girls. Although there are some suggestions of differences between boys and girls, they are not statistically significant.

Insert Table 3 about here

Among American students, while contributions to the respondent are, again, the most frequent reason, especially for girls, followed by qualities of the admired individual, acheivement is also cited as a basis for admiration, especially among boys. Sex differences are statistically significant: $X^2(2) = 13.78$, $p<.01$. A major contribution to this difference is the more frequent citation of acheivement by boys. Comparison of African and American students independent of sex falls short of significance at the .05 level, $X^2(2)= 5.70$, but it suggests that Africans place a greater weight upon gratitude than Americans whereas Americans value acheivement more than do Africans.

Discussion

Statistical comparisons fail to capture fully the qualitative differences between and within national groups that are provided by an open-ended form of questioning. Problems of generalization are further complicated by the small size of the samples and the fact that they reflect a very limited subset of the larger group. In addition, there is much greater variability in age and grade among the African sample who, on average, are much older than their American counterparts. For these reasons, extrapolation beyond the data must be made with greater than average caution.

One impression that emerges from these data (as well as other evidence not included here is the relatively small effect of age: values of admiration appear to be acquired very early and, with a few exceptions, to be relatively unchanged across a broad age range. Intimates, parents, other relatives, teachers, friends, and siblings, constitute the preponderant objects of admiration for all children regardless of nationality and the quality of the relation serves as the primary justification for admiration. Bonds of love, caring, and instruction from the admired person are commonly cited as a criterion of admiration as are personal qualities. It is only among American children, especially boys, that acheivement is a common criterion --what the individual does and how well he or she does it, rather than the sort of person the admired one is.

There are many possible explanations for the cultural and sex differences reported here but the data themselves do not provide an adequate basis for choosing among them. The increased availability of and exposure to television comes immediately to mind as a possible explanation for citation of entertainers and, among boys, sports figures in America. But why has the outside world, as mediated by television, come so early to rival the influence of closer associates of home and school? A theoretical framework that seems to me to account well for the data presented here derives from D. Bakan's (1966) account of the principles of agency and communion. Agency, in Bakan's formulation, values individuality, acheivement, and suppression of emotion, whereas communion expresses itself through participation in a larger whole, harmony, expression of feeling, cooperation, and sharing. The splitting of agency from communion, according to Bakan, arises from the agency feature itself and from its repression of the communion from which it has separated itself.

The cultural background of the African students as reflected in their essays appears to be one of communion. They value the individual who is a good group member and who serves as a model of harmonious cooperative rela-

tions. The person is typically described as friendly, caring, sharing, kind, helpful, and engaged in instructing the child in proper conduct. There are no significant sex differences among African students in the expression of this norm either in the identity of the admired individual or in the criteria of admiration. Among American children, on the other hand, differences are observed that appear to parallel differences reported in studies of moral judgment that are central to Gilligan's (1982) criticisms of Kohlberg The early emergence of agency as a determinant of values among American boys is reflected in their greater tendency to admire persons outside their immediate circle (sports figures and entertainers), their greater invocation of acheivement as a criterion of admiration, and their devaluation of both prominent women and of traditionally feminine occupations such as social worker. Girls, on the other hand, as asserted by Gilligan, manifest the values of communion, although, in contrast to the African products of a more traditional society, peers play a larger role than elders in the focus of admiration. Other evidence that I have gathered from high school and college students suggests that American youth are not homogeneous in their patterns of admiration, but that there are differences among cultural subgroups in the relative influences of agency and communion and that one is ill-advised to generalize broadly about the heroes and role models of American youth.

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Table 1: Identity of Admired Individual

Frequency and (Percent)

Individual	African Male	African Female	African All	American Male	American Female	American All
Parent	35 (45)	34 (46)	69 (46)	25 (25)	29 (25)	54 (25)
Mentor	18 (23)	16 (22)	34 (22)	10 (10)	16 (14)	26 (12)
Peer, Sib	16 (21)	16 (22)	32 (21)	19 (19)	47 (41)	66 (31)
Political	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (1)	3 (3)	0	3 (1)
Humanitarian	4 (5)	3 (4)	7 (5)	1 (1)	3 (3)	4 (2)
Intellectual	0	0	0	3 (3)	6 (5)	9 (4)
Entertainer	0	1 (1)	1 (1)	13 (13)	10 (9)	23 (11)
Sport, Athlete	3 (4)	0	3 (2)	24 (24)	4 (3)	28 (13)
Wealthy Person	0	0	0	1 (1)	0	1 (½)
Other	0	3 (4)	3 (2)	1 (1)	0	1 (½)
N	77	74	151	100	115	215

Table 2

Sex of Admired Person

Frequency and (Percent)

	African			American		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Female	16 (21)	35 (47)	51 (34)	12 (12)	74 (64)	86 (40)
Male	38 (49)	16 (22)	54 (36)	71 (71)	18 (16)	89 (41)
Other	23 (30)	23 (31)	46 (30)	17 (17)	23 (20)	40 (19)
N	77	74	151	100	115	215

Table 3: Reason for Admiration

Frequency and (Percent)

	African			American		
Reason	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Contribution, Society	5 (6)	2 (3)	7 (5)	2 (2)	4 (3)	6 (3)
Contribution, Personal	36 (47)	32 (43)	68 (45)	30 (30)	49 (43)	79 (37)
Role Model	2 (3)	3 (4)	5 (3)	13 (13)	10 (9)	23 (11)
Perseverence Overcoming Adversity	0	0	0	1 (1)	3 (3)	4 (2)
Personal Qualities	20 (26)	31 (42)	51 (34)	21 (21)	35 (30)	56 (26)
Role in Society	0	2 (3)	2 (1)	4 (4)	0	4 (2)
Achieve Acclaim	2 (3)	0	2 (1)	9 (9)	7 (7)	16 (7)
Acheive Excellence	4 (5)	2 (3)	6 (4)	18 (18)	6 (5)	24 (11)
Other	8 (10)	2 (3)	10 (7)	2 (2)	1 (1)	3 (1)
Number in Sample	77	74	151	100	115	215

Appendix A

Explanation of coding categories for identity of nominee, sex of nominee, reason.

Coding of identity of nominee.

1. Parent. One or both

2. Mentor. Teacher or relative other than parent

3. Peer. Sibling, classmate, friend.

4. Political figure. President, mayor, governor, or foreign leader.

5. Humanitarian. Most common American entries are Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Theresa, Mohandas K. Gannhi, Helen Keller: people who devote their lives to a cause of promoting human welfare. Religious figures such as Jesus, Desmond Tutu, even the Pope are included here but televangelists would generally not be included.

6. Intellectual contributor. Writer, composer, artist, scientist, or inventor.

7. Movie and TV entertainers and rock musicians.

8. Sports figures and olympic atheletes.

9. Wealthy person. Donald Trump is most common American entry but "sharp dressers" are included here.

0. Other. NY City firefighters, students who work their way through college are two examples of entries that do not go in any other category.

Coding of sex of nominee.

0. All nominees are female.

1. All nominees are male.

2. First nominee is female, second is male.

3. First nominee is male, second is female.

4. Lists "parents" or whole family.

Coding of reason for admiration.

1. Contribution to Society (or, at least, some group broader than immediate family.

2. Contribution to personal well-being. Cares for me, feeds me, buys me things, gives advice, helps with homework, pays my tuition (very common in African responses). Contribution to family welfare also so coded.

3. Personal attribute of working hard, expending effort, persevering, not giving up.

4. Personal attribut in the sense that the individual embodies some quality admired by essaist who explicitly acknowledges emulation (I want to be like ..).

5. Any personal quality or attribute of the admired individual: kind, generous, caring, brave, funny, friendly, outgoing, etc.

6. Transcending adversity. This category combines 3, 4, or 5 with recognition of acheivement. Many college students admire a parent or grandparent who began as a poor immigrant but acheived education, wealth, community stature, or provided opportunity for family. A single parent is also often mentioned. Transcending serious handicap, e.g., Helen Keller, is also often cited.

7. Status in society. The individual is admired for having the role rather than for what he or she does in that capacity (e.g. "he is the president", or Pope, Saviour, Parent, etc.--respect for the role).

8. Acheiving acclaim, fame, wealth, power as the major emphasis rather than the means of doing so.

9. Acheiving excellence, special skill. Distinction between this and the previous category is that justification emphasizes the quality of the acheivement rather than the acclaim accorded it.

0. Justifications not falling into anyother category.

Pooling of categories.

For some analyses categories are pooled as follows: Identity of nominee. Categories 1, 2, 3, are usually personally -even intimately- involved with rater; of other categories not personally known 4, 5, 6 are combined in one group and 7, 8, 9 into a second group. Reason for admiration. Categories 1 and 2 emphasize contribution; 3, 4, 5, 6 are alike in emphasizing a quality or attrbute of the individual whereas 7, 8, 9 focus upon acheivement-- not what the person is but upon what he or she does and how it is regarded.